

BOOK OF MICAH

Approximate date: 700s B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate); 400s-200s B.C.E. (Left)

Time period: judgment on the Northern Kingdom, and promised judgment on the Southern Kingdom

Author(s): Micah (Right, some conservative-moderate); Micah and/or anonymous other(s) (some conservative moderate); Micah and anonymous redactors (Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Target audience and location: Jerusalemites

People:

Micah

People mentioned:

Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Jacob (representing “Israel”), Assyrian(s), Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Balak, Balaam, Omri, Ahab, Abraham

Places:

Moresbeth, Judah, Samaria, Jerusalem, Babylon, Bethlehem Ephratah

Places mentioned:

Gath, Beth Ophrah, Shaphir, Zaanan, Beth Ezel, Maroth, Lachish, Moresbeth Gath, Aczib, Mareshah, Adullam, land of Nimrod (Assyria), Egypt, Moab, Shittim, Gilgal, Assyria, Euphrates, Bashan, Gilead

Key Themes:

judgment is proclaimed against Jerusalem, but most especially Samaria because of its idolatry / the Lord proclaims that varied towns throughout Israel will weep and mourn / God says that He is planning disaster against those who plan evil / Micah describes false prophets who reject the righteous judgment of the Lord / God as King promises deliverance for His people / the Lord rebukes false prophets and leaders who should have upheld His standard of justice, and have failed to do so / the Lord says that in the Last Days the nations will look to Zion and be taught from His Torah and the Word / the Lord promises restoration for the exiles of Zion / the “Daughter of Zion” will be sent to Babylon, only later to be rescued / a Deliverer for Zion will arise from Bethlehem Ephratah, One who will serve as Shepherd and whose peace will reach all over the world / “Assyria” will be defeated by God’s Deliverer / the Lord declares the mighty deliverances He has performed for Israel / Micah calls the people to perform justice, mercy, and walk humbly before God / Micah says that the people must be punished, as Judah has fallen prey to the sins of Omri and Ahab / Micah summarizes the gross sins that have engulfed Judah/ Micah declares that although the people have fallen, they will rise up and experience the power of the Lord / Micah asserts that God’s mercy upon His people will ultimately prevail

Key Scriptures: Micah 2:1-4, 6; 3:5-7; 4:1-3, 6-8; 5:2-4; 6:8, 16; 7:7, 16, 18-20 / **The trial of the capitals** (1:1-2:13); **The trial of the leaders** (3:1-5:15); **The trial of the people** (6:1-7:20)

Theological Summary: The name Micah (Heb. *Mikah*, מִיכָה) means “who is like the LORD”? We know very little of the prophet who bears this name, other than the fact that Micah was from the village of Moresbeth (1:1; cf. Jeremiah 26:18) in southern Judah. Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (750-686 B.C.E.), making him a contemporary of Isaiah and Amos. The birthplace of Amos, Tekoa (Amos 1:1),

was less than twenty miles from Moresheth, and this would likely have had an influence on Micah's message.¹ In the traditional Jewish order of the Tanach, the Book of Micah appears sixth among the Twelve Prophets, but in the Greek LXX Micah is placed third after Amos and Hosea, likely because of the time period it was composed or its length.²

It is unknown whether Micah actually wrote his prophecies, or whether someone else wrote them down for him.³ Conservatives widely hold to some kind of unity for Micah.⁴ It is possible that chs. 5-7 may include some expansions of genuine Micah material,⁵ but nothing so substantial so as to alter the original prophecies. These slight expansions could reflect the thoughts of those who received his initial prophecies. However, likewise important to note is that many conservatives hold to Micah's uniqueness in thought and language as being a direct result of his authorship, not the compilation of some of his followers and/or supporters.⁶ But regardless of which option is the case, the most important factor to keep in mind is that "If one grants the possibility of predictive prophecy...there are no persuasive reasons for denying Micah authorship of any part of the book" (Dillard and Longman).⁷

Liberals, in stark contrast to conservatives, have often felt that only certain sections of the Book of Micah are authentic to the prophet, namely those sections that are negative and deal with God's judgment. This view is commonly supported with Jeremiah's quote from Micah (Jeremiah 26:18) of Micah being a prophet of doom.⁸ The more positive sections of Micah (2:12-13; chs. 4-7) are often believed to have been added at a later date⁹ after the Babylonian exile.¹⁰ Liberals also commonly argue that the reference to "Babylon" (4:6-13) must also be a later interpolation, but conservatives often respond by pointing out that "Babylon" could be viewed as a general reference to the East, and that "Against a poetic background of the kind employed by Micah, both 'Assyrian' and 'Babylon' would be perfectly acceptable surrogates" (Harrison).¹¹

When encountering liberal views of Micah, one will see that critical scholarship has widely held the text to be made up of short poems and oracles strung together by a later editor.¹² Some liberals today, though, primarily on the basis of literary grounds, are acceding more unity to the text of Micah. "This hypothesis permits one to see many of the disparate elements in Micah as united by the common psychological or social situation from which they arise" (*ABD*),¹³ including a great part of it actually originating in the Eighth Century B.C.E. Still, another current avenue in liberal scholarship is to simply analyze Micah for its theology and message, as often no liberal consensus can arise as to how the text came to exist in its present form.¹⁴

Conservative and liberal presuppositions of the composition of Micah undoubtedly affect how the integrity of the text is viewed. Some liberals feel that the Hebrew MT of Micah is in bad condition. They insist that usage of secondary resources such as the Greek LXX, Syriac Peshitta, and most recently the DSS is often necessary for understanding it.¹⁵ Conservatives, in contrast, often feel that the Hebrew MT of Micah is in relatively good condition, and that the witnesses of the DSS indicate that there has been little problem in Micah's textual transmission.¹⁶

¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 920; T.E. McComiskey, "Micah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 3:344.

² Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 919.

³ *Ibid.*, 925.

⁴ T.E. McComiskey, "Micah," in *EXP*, 7:397.

⁵ John W. Rogerson, "Micah," in *ECB*, 703.

⁶ McComiskey, in *EXP*, 7:398.

⁷ Dillard and Longman, 398.

⁸ R. Laird Harris, "Micah, Book of," in *NIDB*, 647.

⁹ E.A. Leslie, "Micah the prophet," in *IDB*, 3:371; J.M. Ward, "Micah the prophet," in *IDBSup*, 593; Charles S. Shaw, "Micah, Book of," in *EDB*, 894.

¹⁰ Dillard and Longman, 399.

¹¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 924.

¹² Delbert R. Hillers, "Micah, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:807-808.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4:809.

¹⁴ Shaw, "Micah, Book of," in *EDB*, 895.

¹⁵ Hillers, "Micah, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:809.

¹⁶ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 925.

The Prophet Micah does not demonstrate the same political knowledge of Judah as does Isaiah, even though they both demonstrate some level of affinity (4:1-4 and Isaiah 2:2-4 are effectively the same Scriptures). Micah reflects the position of someone from the villages¹⁷ and his message does concern the social injustices of the common people.¹⁸ As a result of what has happened, Micah predicts the fall of Samaria (1:5-7) and the eventual defeat of Judah (1:9-16). While Micah attacks the idolatry of Israel, he is actually more concerned about the state of the people who had suffered as a result of its ensuing corruption.¹⁹ The important historical backdrop to consider when examining Micah includes the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria, and the near destruction of the Southern Kingdom by Assyria.²⁰ Two major periods are covered: the last years of the Divided Monarchy, followed by the monarchy of Judah alone. One can certainly see some parallels between the style of Micah and the style of Isaiah.

Micah's prophecies alternate between a message of judgment and a message of hope.²¹ God hates idolatry and injustice (3:8), but will pardon the repentant (7:18-19). Chs. 2-3 generally deal with Judah's sins, and its oppression of the poor. But in spite of the judgment that God will inflict, Zion will be afforded a position of greater prestige (4:1-2) in the future, and a Deliverer will be sent (5:1-4). A unique thrust of Micah is that in spite of God's judgment upon Israel and Judah, this would nevertheless be used by Him for His redemption to be accomplished in the whole world.²²

Micah 5:2 is a very important passage relating to the prophetic expectation embodied in Yeshua the Messiah, as quoted in Matthew 2:6. Micah 4:1-5 depicts the elevation of the mountain of God, and 6:6-8 lists the traits that God desires of His people.²³ The eschatological message of Micah undoubtedly affected the worldview of the Apostles.

There is currently not a great deal of Messianic engagement with the Book of Micah, even though Micah 5:6-6:8 is the Haftarah reading for *Balak* (Numbers 22:2-25:9). Micah does play a role among various Jewish traditions in the customary readings of the Fall high holidays.²⁴ Micah, similar to Amos, asks Messianics today difficult questions regarding social engagement. More importantly, Micah asks us questions about the punishment meted by God upon Israel, and the promises of redemption via a Messianic King.

Bibliography

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¹⁷ Leslie, "Micah the prophet," in *IDB*, 3:369; Judith E. Sanderson, "Micah," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1303.

¹⁸ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 921.

¹⁹ McComiskey, in *EXP*, 7:395.

²⁰ McComiskey, "Micah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 3:344; Dillard and Longman, pp 398-399.

²¹ Dillard and Longman, pp 401-402.

²² McComiskey, "Micah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 3:346; McComiskey, in *EXP*, 7:339.

²³ Dillard and Longman, pp 397, 402.

²⁴ Ehud ben Zvi, "Micah," in *Jewish Study Bible*, pp 1205-1206.